

The Annals of Our Lady of the Angels

A Glimpse Into the Person of Mother Mary Ignatius

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THE CEMETERY OF San Lorenzo in Campo Veranno, Rome, is a veritable city within a city. It is here that one finds the Chapel of St. Michael Archangel, the final resting place of Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes as well as the burial place for a number of the spiritual daughters of her Congregation, the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. At her death on May 6, 1894, Mother Ignatius' precious remains were placed in a temporary deposit at San Lorenzo Cemetery. Subsequently, on the feast of St. Ignatius, her remains were transferred to a vault of the Chapel of the Arch Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood. Here her body remained until it was taken ten years later to its final resting place in the Chapel of St. Michael the Archangel. The construction and completion of this Chapel was made possible through the generosity of the associates of St. Michael the Archangel, an association initiated by Mother Mary Ignatius, and propagated through *The Annals of Our Lady of the Angels*. We take from the September 1904 issue of the magazine the account of the translation of the body of our beloved Mother to its last resting place: "On the eve of the feast of the Sacred Heart, the body of our venerable Foundress, Mother Mary Ignatius of Jesus, was translated from the Mortuary Chapel of the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, where she was interred after her holy death in May 1894, and deposited in that of St. Michael. The Very Reverend Father Provincial of the Roman Province of the Seraphic Order, P. Bonaventure Chiarinelli, O.T.M., officiated at the ceremony, assisted by several of the Fathers. The tomb being opened and the suffrages prescribed by the rite being made, the casket containing the dear remains of our Mother was lifted by the pall-bearers, and borne thither, accompanied by a long procession, headed by the Cross, and composed of Franciscan Fathers, acolytes, Sisters of the Institute, little girls dressed in white carrying lilies, and a considerable number of friends, all carrying lighted tapers. It was truly an impressive sight; and the monotonous chant of the psalms and prayers, made it all the more awe-inspiring" ("The Dedication of St. Michael's Mortuary Chapel"). The inscription on her original headstone read as follows:

Sister Mary Ignatius of Jesus, O.S.F
Abbess

Born in Guernsey of Philip Hayes Named Elizabeth

Died in Rome the 6th of May 1894 at 73 years

She was Foundress in Rome and in various cities of
Italy and America of several Franciscan Houses of the
Immaculate Conception of the Third Order Regular of
St. Francis of Assisi

She instituted the Confraternity for the diffusion of good books

With the Title work of S. Anthony of Padua

Under the Protection of the Blessed and Immaculate
Virgin Mary Queen of the Angels

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How simple is this statement, yet how profound the journey which led to its accomplishments.

Mother Mary Ignatius has been described in a variety of ways, as is evident in the materials contained in the Institute Archives, Rome, Italy. "Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes shines out ... as one who dominated events and did not let events dominate her" (*In the Shadow of His Wings*, by Sister Assumpta Ahles, O.S.F, 1977). "This woman, who became Mother Mary Ignatius of Jesus in religion, is one of the most interesting religious personages of American Church history" (*Catholic Minnesota-Historic Places and Tours*, 1958). "This spring Mother Mary Ignatius of Jesus arrived on the stage at Belle Prairie. She is an English intellectual, proficient in French, and thus well qualified to establish a school for French Canadian children in the community" (*Minneapolis Tribune-quoted in The First Cross*, Belle Prairie, Diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota, 1970). ". . . she was a very real person with very normal aspirations which she sought to carry out in equally normal ways. That these ways sometimes turned out to be challenging in the extreme showed the calibre of the woman she really was: the woman who never gave up" (*The Mission Dream of Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes*, by Sister Assumpta Ahles, O.S.F, 1969). ". . . But there are other expressions of saintliness. One is an energetic sense of mission so strong that he or she who has it will ride rough shod over obstacles to reach the goal. Such, in my opinion, was the passionate determination of Elizabeth Hayes" (*Unless the Seed Die*, by Brian de Breffny, 1980

It is the intention of this present article to describe Mother Ignatius as she is indirectly portrayed through the early editions of the *Annals of Our Lady of the Angels*. These first volumes contain a wealth of resources which reveal much about the aspirations, the vision, the spirituality of Mother Ignatius. That she would have undertaken the challenge of this publication in January 1874, within a year after the foundation of the Order in Belle Prairie, Minnesota, is a marvel in itself. As her Community was still in its infancy stage, she would have been the only one capable of direction such an initiative. This fact alone attests to the stamina, the courage, and the foresight of her character and personality. Current research, not yet complete, leads us to believe that her publication may have been the first Franciscan periodical published in the English language in the United States. During the years of 1874-1894, and in particular in the beginning years of that span of time, Mother Ignatius would have been editor, publisher, circulation and financial manager of this undertaking. In this capacity the responsibility for the selection of materials was hers. Therefore, one may surmise that these selections reflected, as least in great part, her own thinking.

Today, the Church is more aware than ever of the power of the mass media as a tool in the process of evangelization. Creative ways of proclaiming the Word are, therefore, a basic challenge to the Church. In talking about the cultural areas towards which he would orient his mission, the Holy Father, John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, affirms: "The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communication, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a global village." The most recent document on social communication, *Aetatis Novae*, reaffirms what *Evangelii Nuntiandi* had already said: "The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect . . . The means of communication can and must be instruments at the service of the Church's program for the re-evangelization or the new evangelization in the contemporary world."

Viewed in light of these recent pronouncements of the Church on the use of mass communication in the task of evangelization, *The Annals of Our Lady of the Angels* would certainly be considered an authentic tool of evangelization. This was recognized even in the time of its initiation. Mr. M. C. Russell, the editor and proprietor of the *Brainerd (Minnesota) Tribune*, in the January 17, 1894, issue of his paper referred to the *Annals* thus: "The February number will be an interesting one to protestants as well as catholics. The editor (a lady of extraordinary attainments and great piety) intends to add to and beautify her already highly

creditable publication, as she goes on, . . . we claim it to be a great credit, in every respect to our young city . . ." The St. Paul, Minnesota, *Northwestern Chronicle* of August 1, 1874, states: "We do not see how it could be done much better in the east. This monthly is interesting, besides its good reading, as a tide mark of the advance of catholicity and catholic literature in this country." The *Ave Maria* of June 8, 1878, in pointing up the "contents of the present number," remarked: "Contrary to what its title would seem to indicate, the *Annals* is not an exclusively devotional or ascetic work; a great portion of its contents is made up of interesting stories and sketches which cannot fail to make the magazine attractive to the general reader, and thus in a measure to counteract the growing appetite for nonsensical trash."

In the introductory page of the first issue, January 1874, we read: "To the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order. May God give us His holy Peace. In the humble hope of making more widely known, and therefore more truly loved, the devotion to our Seraphic Patriarch, we have ventured on the publication of these *ANNALS* ... Besides affording matter of interest to the general reader, it will be our endeavor to make the *ANNALS* as much as possible a faithful medium of communicating to you the present progress and development of the Order, its missions, new foundations, and good works, as well as its past history, legends and traditions." In her task of editing, Mother Ignatius remained faithful to this purpose. This is evidenced by the consistent appearance in those first issues of numerous articles on Franciscanism from practically every corner of the earth: "A Tertiary's Account of the English Pilgrimage" (Jan. 1874), "Belgian Pilgrimage" (Feb. 1874), "Establishment of the Third Order in Haiti" (May 1874), "A Chronicle of the Early Franciscan Missions" (Mar. 1875), "African Missions" (June 1878), "The Franciscan Order in England" (carried as a series, May-Nov. 1880; Feb.-Mar. 1883), "The New Franciscan Mission in Brazil" (Jan. 1884), "The Franciscan Mission of the Holy Land" (May 1884), "The Church of St. Francis in Madrid" (Dec. 1889). While chronicling the history, growth, and development of the Franciscan movement, the geographical scope of these accounts, and others, testifies also to the missionary heart of Mother Ignatius. "I go neither to place nor person: simply God calls me to leave my home and country and to join a foreign mission. If the time were to come over again, I would do just the same" (*Diary*).

Inherent in these published articles was a call to action and to fidelity to the values and concerns of the followers of St. Francis — to love as Francis loved, to be loyal to Holy Mother Church, to those places and events connected with our Redemption that so stirred the soul of St. Francis: the Crib, the Cross, the Eucharist. In addition, the great love and devotion to Mary, especially under the titles of Queen of Angels and the Immaculate Conception, was promulgated through various ways-poems, serials, and accounts of pilgrimages to different shrines of Our Lady. We can legitimately conclude, I believe, that aspects, shades, and characteristics of the spirituality of Mother Ignatius are reflected in her choice of articles. Several months after her death, an account of the life of Mother Ignatius entitled "A Brief Sketch of the Life of the late Sister Mary Ignatius of Jesus, O.S.F, Foundress of the Association of St. Anthony of Padua for the Diffusion of Good Books" was part of the October 1894 issue of the *Annals*. Although no author is given, the account was most likely written by Sister Mary of the Angels Chaffee, her friend and companion, who was Vicarress at the time of the death of the foundress and who succeeded her as second Superior General. In the concluding paragraph we read: "Her principal attractions in prayer were 1st, towards our Blessed Lord in the Holy Eucharist, and to his Silence before his accusers; 2nd, to the Holy Ghost, Whom she invoked in her daily Communion for the gift of Understanding and Light to discern God's Holy Will; 3rd, to the Immaculate Conception and to Our Blessed Lady's life on earth after the Ascension of her Divine Son. Then came her devotion to the Seraphic Love and Poverty of St. Francis, and the Universal Charity and Apostolic Zeal of St. Anthony."

Mother Mary Ignatius' soul-searching experience which eventually led her from the Anglican Church into the Roman Catholic Church probably influenced her selection of materials focused on the search for meaning in one's faith. The *Annals* repeatedly stressed such topics as: "The Infallibility of the Church" (Apr. 1874), "God Revealed Through the Church" (Aug. 1874), "The Life of the Catholic Faith" (Oct. 1874), "Can Both Churches be True?" (Dec. 1874), "Temptations Against Faith" (Jan. 1875), "Our Faith Is Not a Fancy or a Feeling" (Aug. 1880), "Against Heresy in Catholic Garb" (July 1886). Mother Ignatius embraced her newfound faith with great joy and humility—"The greatest miracle is myself, that I should be a Catholic, a religious, a Franciscan" (*Diary*). "O the happiness of dying a child of Holy Church!... I would like everyone to know of my happiness" (uttered shortly before her death). This desire, that all might be brought to the happiness she knew as a child of Holy Mother Church, would have led her to choose themes that would teach and uphold the truths of the Catholic faith. Thus we find treatises on the canonization of saints, why we invoke the saints, indulgences, the infallibility of the Church, the mercy of God, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and numerous others in this same vein. Another facet of Mother Ignatius which can be gleaned from the *Annals* was her deep concern for the welfare of the Church, in particular, for the welfare and needs of the Holy Father. This was manifested again and again in a variety of ways such as excerpts from Papal Documents, "Decree of Pope Leo XIII" (Jan. 1883), "Encyclical Letter of Our Holy Father the Pope" (Mar. 1886), stories from the lives of the Popes, "St. Gregory, the Great Pope" (Nov. 1884), "Pope Leo XIII" (July 1878), "Leo XIII and the Third Order" (Apr. 1883), "The Pope Infallible" (Dec. 1874)

The lives of the saints, in particular saints of the Seraphic Order, as witnesses to God's love and the possibility of perseverance in the faith, permeated every issue of the early *Annals*. That she herself was influenced by meditation on such lives can be deduced from these words in her *Diary*: "It is a grace God gives us to see that it is not the fault of persons nor of circumstances but our want of correspondence with Divine inspirations and graces that prevent our being Saints. We could not even see that but for the light of God's grace... I pray much for a spirit of prayer and devotion to the Holy Spirit who will inspire my mind and fill it with unction to guide me aright in whatever office I may be called upon to fill. How did the saints become what they were? How did they work such marvels in the souls of others? By prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. . . Under the circumstances, I ask myself, how can I become a saint? An interior voice seems to be constantly whispering in my ear: you are just in the best condition to be a saint. Even while I weep a whisper seems to say: There is something in all of this that would make you a saint if only you were willing and used it so." The saint to whom she seemed most devoted was the great Franciscan saint, Anthony of Padua. Of the first twelve issues in 1894, eleven contain a section on the Life of St. Anthony of Padua. Later issues, as well, continued to highlight this great saint of the Seraphic Order.

While the early issues contain very little reference to Mother Ignatius herself, they do reveal more of her person than might, at first, be apparent. Through a careful reading of the early *Annals*, at least for this writer, I find the spirit and person of Mother Ignatius pulsing through every issue. The nature and tenor of the early issues of the *Annals* bear witness to Mother Mary Ignatius' conviction that the apostolate of the press was a powerful means of evangelization, a call to action, a call to the service of God and the world. It is interesting to note in the March and June issues of 1890 articles entitled "The Apostolate of the Press," and in the July issue is found an extract from an Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Catholic Press addressed to the Archbishops and Bishops of Italy. Mother Ignatius' efforts in the publication of the *Annals of Our Lady of the Angels* find affirmation in these words of Pope Leo XIII: ". . . we must oppose writing with writing, and of this powerful engine for ruin make an equally powerful instrument for salvation and to make use of a clear and easy style, that shall be within the comprehension of all."

The survival of this magazine in the midst of the struggles and uncertainties of a new foundation could only have been accomplished through the faith, courage, and determination of an extraordinary person. In the person of one sent, Mother Ignatius moved into her world of the 19th century afire with the passion of possibility — a possibility opened up by her ardent seeking of God's Will in all things: "My principal prayer is to know the will of God and my only resolution to do it" (*Diary*); her deep faith and confidence in God: "There are only two ways: the ordinary way of prudence and the extraordinary way of faith and confidence in God" (*Diary*); and her desire to give all for the love of Christ, her Spouse: "Remember this principle — love counts nothing hard it does for the Beloved" (*Diary*). In this belief and love, all was possible to her. The following lines from "The Moment, by Kirkegaard, seem to capture the spirit and courage of Mother Mary Ignatius, a woman who would not give up.

If I could wish for something
I would wish for neither wealth nor power
but the passion of possibility:
I would wish only for an eye
which, eternally young,
eternally burns
with the longing to see possibility